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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

No. 26 | TORONTO | April, 1943

CHINTZ SMUGGLING

Men were once executed for the crime of importing chintz curtains. In the early part of the 18th century it was forbidden to bring printed cottons into England and France, or to manufacture them in these countries, and many people paid with their lives for smuggling the contraband material.

A special exhibition in one of the textile galleries of the Royal Ontario Museum illustrates the history of chintz, which may be a stay-at-home material nowadays but has a highly coloured past. Chintz came originally from India and was one of the important articles of trade that the English, Dutch and French East India Companies fought over, during the 17th and 18th centuries. Europe was thrilled with the gay cottons from the East. Chintz soon became so popular that the linen, silk and wool merchants were alarmed and brought pressure to bear on the government which resulted in the laws forbidding both the importation and the making of chintz. This simply increased the fashion for it and eventually the authorities had to withdraw their orders and make way for the great modern cotton printing industry.

STICKS OF LIGHTNING

At the Royal Ontario Museum we noticed examples of an odd mineral called "fulgurite" or "lechatelierite." They were hollow, white tubes, smooth on the inside and rough on the outside. We found that when lightning strikes the earth it tries to go straight down, seeking its opposite electrical pole. In going through sand, the intense heat sometimes fuses together the quartz grains of which the sand is composed, leaving behind these thin cylinders which can be picked out and removed. In some parts of the world where sand dunes are prevalent there are numerous fulgurites, some many feet long—fragile, fantastic sticks of "lightning in sand."

THE CHANGING STREAM

The life of man and animals has been compared to a river, continually flowing yet changing in its course. Exhibits in the Royal Ontario Museum illustrate the nature of this life stream. The current passes from bow and flint-headed arrows, through cross-bow and steel-tipped arrows, to flint lock and modern guns. It passes from five-toed horses, through intermediate stages, to modern horses with a single toe. It shifts from the simple untended egg cache of the reptile, to the complex and guarded nest of the bird. The details change but the broad character persists. Ripples appear on the surface but the stream rushes on.

MUSEUM HOURS

When in Toronto you will find the Museum open free from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, and on Sundays from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. As a war measure it is closed on Mondays. There is a 15c. admission charge on Wednesdays and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

FISH ON THE FOOD FRONT

Fish can be counted among the most important products of Canada. An exhibit in the Royal Ontario Museum points out that commercial fisheries, on the average, brought a forty-million dollar annual return to Canada before the war. That makes commercial fisheries important any year but at the present time they are even vital. Fish are now on the food front. Canada is sending more canned fish to Britain than ever before.

"Of the nearly six hundred kinds of fish found in our salt and fresh waters thirty are especially important in commerce," according to Professor J. R. Dymond of the Museum. "Of these, the salmons—five Pacific and one Atlantic—are pre-eminent. Of the strictly marine fish, herring, cod, halibut and haddock head the list. Whitefish ranks first in value among the freshwater kinds."

"Are all of these kinds on view in the Museum's gallery, so that the public can see the wealth of fish-life Canada possesses?" we ask.

"The Museum has on display no less than one hundred and sixty life-like examples of Canadian fishes," stated Professor Dymond.

AN ANCIENT SHOWER

In the Royal Ontario Museum there is an authentic record of a shower that fell millions of years ago. A regularly pitted slab of drab-coloured rock is proof of it. Dr. M. A. Fritz, palaeontologist, explained the phenomenon and imagined the incident in this way: "The tide was out on some lonely shore. A dark cloud passed over. Raindrops spattered and pitted the muddy surface of the tide-flat. Next, the sun broke through, dried the mud, thus fixing the raindrop impressions. When the tide came in again it gently spread a new layer of mud over the pitted surface. In time, a long, long time, the mud of this shore changed to stratified rock. We split that rock and there is the record of an ancient shower."

The specimen on exhibit in the museum proves that raindrops of the past did not differ essentially, in size or character, from those of the present day.

IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE

Ornithologists of the Royal Ontario Museum say that a boom in real estate is imminent. Every knot-hole and thicket will be inspected and appraised—by birds. There will be disputes too. These will be settled by the effective expedient of driving a competitor off the lot. Watch for combats between male robins in your own garden.

Males of many of our common song birds return from the south before the females. Each male attempts to "stake a claim" and advertise his squatter's rights by song. To other males, this song, translated by the Museum's ornithologists, means: "This territory is occupied: trespassers will be persecuted." To females, arriving from the south, it proclaims: "Here is a suitable nesting site. You are invited to accept it, but I (the male) am part of the bargain."